



A career postcode lottery?

Local authority provision of youth and career support following the 2011 Education Act

Emma Langley

Tristram Hooley

Denise Bertuchi

Authors

Emma Langley
Tristram Hooley
Denise Bertuchi

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University of Derby, Derby, DE22 1GB

www.derby.ac.uk/icegs

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UNISON education services

UNISON Centre

130 Euston Road

London NW1 2AY

Telephone: 0845 355 0845

Website <http://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/education-services/>

Email: education@unison.co.uk

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Executive Summary

Since the election of the Coalition Government, England has seen a major change in the delivery of career support for young people. Cuts in funding for Connexions, Aimhigher and Education Business Partnerships have been accompanied by a shift in statutory responsibility from local authorities (LAs) to schools. Such policy has been criticised by a wide range of stakeholders and subjected to some scrutiny. Research in the area has found that there is much uncertainty within schools about how to best discharge their new duty, leading to a variety of different forms of provision being developed. The research has also consistently found that while there are examples of good practice, there has been a substantial overall reduction in the quality and quantity of career education and guidance available to young people.

This study focuses attention on the experiences of LAs and their staff in dealing with these changes. The aim was to explore the current scale and nature of LA careers activities with a view to providing a picture of LA responses to the policy changes. Three surveys were designed and disseminated: one to LAs, to be completed by the Directors of Children's Services or those in equivalent positions; the other two to UNISON members, working in LAs and in schools respectively. The responses from 35 Directors of Children's Services paint a more positive picture than the other surveys: it therefore seems likely that they are representative of the LAs that are most active in this area, rather than all LAs. This non-response bias has been taken into account in the analysis and discussion of results. The study received data from 86 LAs, representing 58.5% of the 147 LAs in England.

The report explores several themes: the resourcing of career and youth support, the provision of universal career support, and how targeted services have been affected. It also discusses the implications of the changes on specific groups such as careers professionals and young people, and suggests ways forward.

Key findings include:

- The overwhelming majority of LAs have significantly reduced their funding for youth and career support since the election of the Coalition Government.
- Most LAs have significantly reduced the number of staff devoted to youth and career support. On average this reduction was just under half of the total staff employed in 2009.
- Unsurprisingly, given current Government policy, the level of LA involvement in universal career provision has dramatically declined. However, while most LAs no longer fund universal services (and those that do, do so at a much reduced level), some have sought to support an orderly transition, whilst others (at most a third and probably less of the total number of LAs) have maintained a strategic involvement in the delivery of career support through a range of activities.
- The provision of targeted services for vulnerable young people has been less seriously affected by policy changes than universal careers services. However, there is some evidence to suggest that fewer services are now available for vulnerable

young people and that the definition of “vulnerability” has narrowed, resulting in a reduction of the availability of such services.

The declining role of LAs in providing youth and career support has considerable implications for a range of stakeholders. These implications can be summarised as follows:

- LAs find themselves in a difficult position where they have responsibility for managing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and ensuring that the policy to raise the participation age (RPA) is implemented, but have declining resources with which to address these important agendas, and very weak policy and accountability levers with which to influence the activities of other players.
- Respondents to the surveys also described the strains that the policy changes were placing on the resources and capacity of schools. In general, respondents echoed the criticisms about the declining scale and scope of careers work that have been made in other recent research reports. They also highlighted concerns about impartiality and observed downward pressures on the salaries and working conditions of careers workers within schools.
- Careers professionals who responded to the survey clearly articulated the challenges of the current environment. They argued that their working conditions and their morale were in decline following the change in policy.
- Respondents were also clear that the policy changes were impacting negatively on young people. Many talked about the fact that young people were now making educational and employment decisions without support and noted that this was leading to unwise choices in many cases.

The general picture revealed by this report is of a declining level of LA involvement in youth and career support and a consequent decline in the quality and quantity of the overall support available. In general, LAs have followed the direction of Government policy and facilitated the transfer of responsibilities to schools whilst focusing what resources they have on the provision of targeted services. However, the survey of Directors of Children’s Services suggests that at least some authorities are seeking to maintain some universal provision, albeit often at a much lower level than in the past (the UNISON members’ survey raises serious questions about the services that are now available as well as about the depletion of professional capacity and professional morale). More broadly, it is clear that some LAs are continuing to play a middle-tier role between schools and government. Such a role seems to have been important in mitigating the impact of government policies on schools and young people in these areas. But whether it will be sustainable for LAs to continue to play this role remains to be seen.

The report finishes by posing a series of questions that should be considered if the current policy is revised in the light of concerns about its effectiveness:

- Is the development of a “postcode lottery” of careers provision an acceptable outcome of school autonomy?

- Is there a continuing role for a middle-tier body between central government and schools?
- Is there a role for local democratic accountability in the delivery of youth and career support?
- How can professional capacity and professional standards be maintained now that the profession has become scattered?

1. Introduction

In the current economic climate, with youth unemployment rising and with an increasingly complex education and training system, young people need added support to establish their careers. Such support is particularly important in periods of rapid economic and policy change when the tried and tested career routes which are understood by parents and teachers may no longer serve young people well. Historically, such support has been delivered through a locally based agency, first the Careers Service and then Connexions. Such professional careers services provided both universal career support for all young people and targeted support to help those who were particularly at risk of failed transitions. An effective infrastructure of career support can also contribute towards improving social mobility and reducing inequality, by helping young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to raise their aspirations and fulfil their potential. This study explores recent changes that have been made to the infrastructure of career support in England and raises a number of concerns with the current direction of policy.

The election of the Coalition Government in 2010 proved to be a pivotal moment for careers work in England's schools. In an early promise to establish an all-age careers service, the then Minister John Hayes (2010) stated that the Government would "build on Next Step and on Connexions because we must not lose the best of either". However, the Government subsequently decided to pursue an alternative path whereby responsibility for careers work was transferred to schools, and local authorities (LAs) were allowed to withdraw from the provision of universal careers support. This was enacted through the Education Act 2011, with the direction of travel being set in train in guidance sent out by the Department for Education (2011).

The rationale for this decision has been much debated. Clearly the opinions of Michael Gove as the Secretary of State have set an important context for Government policy in this field. Gove's recent statement to the House of Commons Education Select Committee that "What I emphatically do not believe is that we need a cadre of careers advisers" finally made public a personal scepticism that has underpinned policy in the area (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013a). In addition, the policy decisions on career education and guidance have been linked to wider policy decisions. Watts (2013a) argues that the policy of school autonomy pursued by the Department for Education alongside the attempt to cut public spending have underpinned the Coalition's volte-face in this area.

It is clear that these policies have weakened the capacity of LAs to impact directly on the lives of young people. This weakening of the power of LAs has further been seen in the development of academies and free schools, and in the awarding of contracts to deliver the Youth Contract. All of these policies have bypassed local government and devolved responsibilities to organisations which are accountable to central rather than local government. The disconnection of local government from youth and career support has been criticised by the Local Government Association (2013a).

The Government's broader policy on career support has attracted criticism from a wide range of stakeholders including UNISON, the Career Development Institute and the CBI.

Some of these concerns were recently summed up by John Cridland (2013), the Head of the CBI, who stated:

Careers advice is on "life support" in many schools in England with teenagers having little knowledge of the workplace... careers guidance must improve for young people faced with a rapidly changing labour market.

Cridland was also critical of the Government's "laissez-faire approach" and predicted "serious consequences for our young people", calling for an increase in the level of face-to-face careers advice for young people.

The impact of the decision to relocate responsibility for career guidance with schools has been well documented in a series of reports including surveys by the Institute of Career Guidance (Nicholls, 2011), Careers England (2012) and Pearson (Coffait, 2013), an inquiry by the House of Commons Education Committee (2013b) and a thematic review by Ofsted (2013). These reports have in general focused their attention on the impact of the changes on schools and on young people themselves. Broadly, the findings can be summarised as indicating that there is much uncertainty within schools as how to best discharge the new duty, leading to a variety of different forms of provision being developed. The research has also consistently found that while there are examples of good practice, there has been a substantial overall reduction in the quality and quantity of career education and guidance available to young people.

Despite this range of criticism, the government has maintained its policy position (DfE & BIS, 2013) with little change and no new funding (Watts, 2013b). During this time the new shape of school-based careers work has begun to take form. However, it is clear that the current arrangements must continue to be seen as in transition, as they appear to have emerged at least in part, in Watts' (2013a) words, "not by design but by default".

Understanding the experience of local authorities

In contrast to the previous research which has tended to focus on the impacts felt by schools and young people, this paper will explore these issues from a different perspective: that of the LAs. A previous paper by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (Hooley & Watts, 2011) also looked at these issues from this perspective. The paper found considerable diversity of approaches to youth and career support across different LAs. It argued that in the majority of LAs, cuts and a changing remit had led to serious rethinking about how such services could and should be organised. It identified four different types of local authority response, which can be summarised as follows:

- Extreme cutting.
- Focusing solely on vulnerable young people.
- Wait and see.
- Working to sustain universal career guidance.

However, this previous research was conducted in the early days of the new policy. It is therefore to be expected that the shape of the LA responses has continued to develop,

informed by the experience of implementation, the continuing development of policy and the long-term impact of cuts to LA budgets.

More recent research conducted for the Local Government Association (Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012a) sought to identify good practices pursued by LAs in managing the policy transition and supporting the successful implementation of key policies in this area. The report identified three policies which are currently framing LAs' actions in this field:

1. While LAs do not have a statutory responsibility to manage the transition of LA responsibility for career support to schools, many have recognised and acted on a moral and administrative responsibility to ensure that it goes smoothly.
2. LAs continue to have a responsibility to address the level of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
3. LAs also have a key role in overseeing the implementation of the policy of raising the participation in learning age (RPA). The Education and Skills Act 2008 requires young people to stay within education or training until the end of the academic year in which students turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015. Clearly the issue of how to keep young people engaged with the education system is likely to require supportive interventions of the kinds that might previously have been provided by Connexions.

Bound up with the latter two policies is the introduction of the destination measure, which currently covers Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 students' progress to further learning and (less comprehensively) to employment. How LAs succeed in tracking the destinations of the young people and intervening to support retention in the education system and achieving positive destinations are clearly interrelated. The LGA (2013b) has produced guidance on this issue which discusses how such tracking needs to be linked up with the provision of youth and career support services.

The role of LAs in this area is made more complex by the loss of the Connexions service, and by the increasing complexity of education, training and transition to work programming within LA areas. In addition to the LAs themselves, such programmes are also funded by a range of different governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental bodies. At least three government departments (DfE, BIS and DWP) have a direct interest in this area and there have also been a range of initiatives from the Cabinet Office and the Offices of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. When this is coupled with initiatives from the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and an already active third sector, it becomes clear that it is difficult for LAs to even keep track of the totality of provision within their locality.

LAs are therefore continuing to be involved in careers work for at least some of the young people in their area. While schools may now have overall responsibility for career support for young people, the LAs are required to retain an interest in those young people who may drop out of participation and become NEET. In practice, it may be difficult to identify these young people, despite the development of the Risk Of NEET Indicators (RONIs) (see DfE, 2012) and similar pre-emptive mechanisms. The challenges of identification may thus in turn drive LAs to deliver some universal services as the most efficient way of accessing the potentially NEET population. These two foci for service delivery are discussed within this

report under the headings of universal career support and targeted support for vulnerable young people. The stance that LAs take with respect to both of these activities is therefore critical in understanding the overall shape of their provision.

The Filmer-Sankey & McCrone (2012a) study highlights a number of activities that constitute good practice for LAs. In the area of universal career support, they note that LAs are actively supporting the transition by providing information and capacity-building initiatives to schools. They are also underpinning the development of new local arrangements for delivery by brokering partnerships and market-making. In contrast, the report notes that the provision of targeted support for vulnerable young people is far more direct, consisting of enhanced identification through RONIs, tracking and the provision of services including considerable amounts of one-to-one and group guidance and engagement activities. However, there is also considerable variability in what LAs are providing and it is this that the current study seeks to investigate.

This study therefore seeks to build on the existing research to deepen understanding of LA approaches to career and youth support. The study describes practice rather than seeking to identify “good” and “bad” LAs. The combination of major policy changes and reduced funding has shaped LA responses in ways that many of the actors within LAs would not have chosen. The capacity of each LA to resist or reinterpret such changes clearly varies, depending upon the financial, political and professional capital that exists within the authority. However, neither is it true to say that authorities have no choices to make, as the wide range of differing responses demonstrates. This study will therefore seek to understand the overall shape of LA responses to the policy changes.

About this study

The current study is the result of a partnership between the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby and UNISON. The aim of the study is to establish a national overview of LA provision of career and youth support services in England, to help inform the development of policy in this area.

The survey seeks to establish an overview of provision, rather than to single out individual LAs for praise or criticism. It is hoped that by improving understanding of the overall picture, it will support the Government to develop its policies, informed by the evidence.

Three surveys were conducted. The first sought responses directly from LAs and received 36 responses. The second survey was of UNISON members/careers professionals, to which we received 157 responses from 72 LAs. In total, from these two sources, the study received responses covering 86 of the 147 LAs (58.5%). The third survey was of UNISON members working in schools where we received responses from 43 schools.

The **LA survey** was completed by Directors of Children’s Services or people in equivalent positions in the LA. It asked detailed information about LA practice and how it had changed since the election of the Coalition Government. Included in the survey was information about resourcing, staff and service provision. This survey provided a detailed picture of career and youth support provision in the authorities that responded. However, the low response rate to this survey (24.5%) needs to be emphasised. The majority of LAs that responded indicated that they were trying to maintain a strategic role in the area of youth and career support. It is

possible that there is some non-response bias in this finding and that those who responded represented the more proactive and positive LAs. The survey of members certainly painted a much more negative picture.

The **survey of UNISON members in LAs** was shorter than the LA survey and sought to gain an overall assessment of the scale and nature of career and youth provision within the LA. It also included opportunities for members to raise their concerns about the current direction of travel.

The **survey of UNISON members in schools** sought information about how careers advice in schools was being delivered.

All data were analysed in Excel. Descriptive statistics are used to present the quantitative data in this report. Qualitative data was coded and analysed systematically. Quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate key points that were raised.

2. The resourcing of career and youth support

The new policy has brought about a major shift in the level of LA resourcing for this area of work. This section will summarise what has been found in relation both to financial investment in the area by authorities and to levels of staffing.

The qualitative responses of UNISON members identified two distinct views about the role of the LA in career guidance. Firstly, some members saw the LA as a facilitator for schools, using the limited resources it has left to help them to offer a good careers service for young people. This was supported by evidence in the LA survey, where for most part LAs described their approach as supporting and signposting provision. A UNISON member commented:

The local authority is working hard in this area to jointly fund with schools a decent offer for all young people but the government's "hands off" approach has made this more difficult.

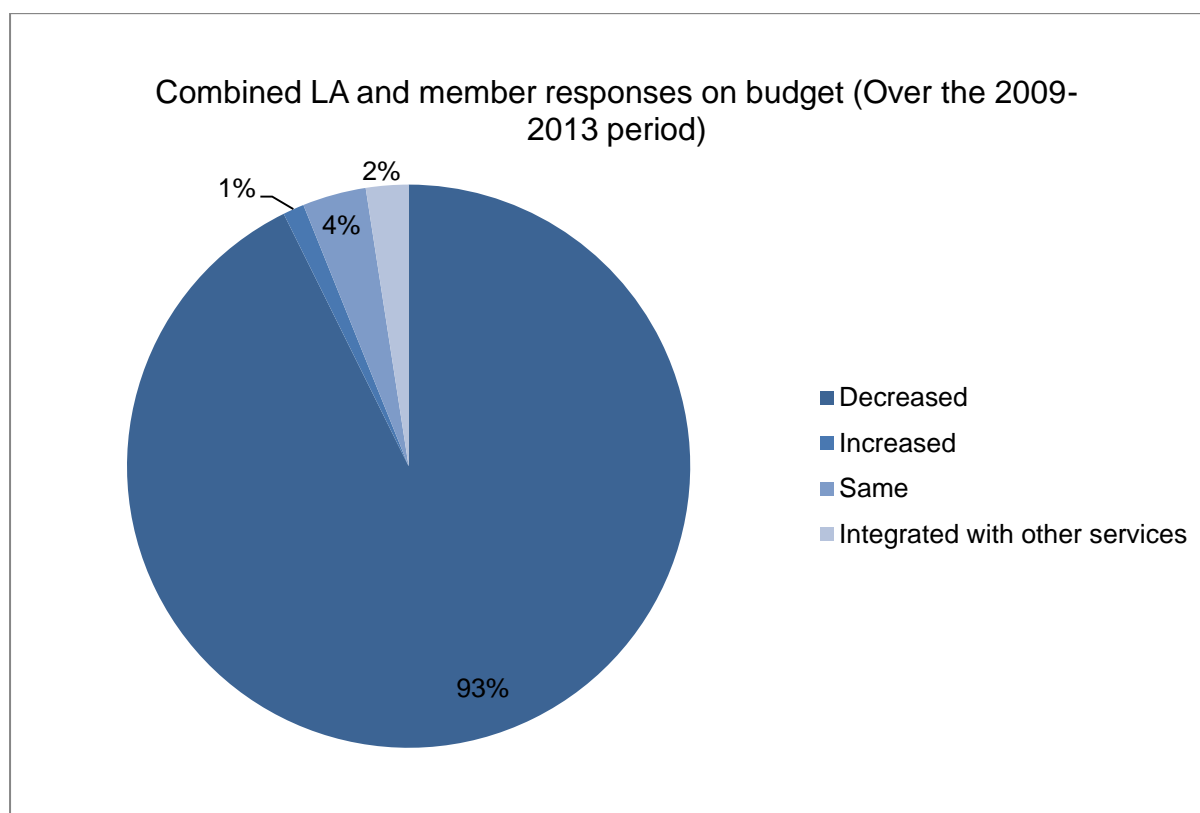
On the other hand, some UNISON members saw the LAs as uneven in this respect, with some discontinuing careers services where others had retained them. This was supported in part by the LA data, where LA support for career services was variable. One UNISON member expressed the opinion that this variation meant that LAs had culpability in the changes as well as the Government:

Although funding and policy do affect this, the fact that careers guidance has been retained in some authorities and not others means local authorities should be held to account as well.

Resourcing

The LA and the UNISON members' survey demonstrated that the LA resourcing of career and youth support has declined. The results from both surveys combined indicate that funding for career and youth support has declined in 93% of the LAs for which we had a response (see Figure 1).

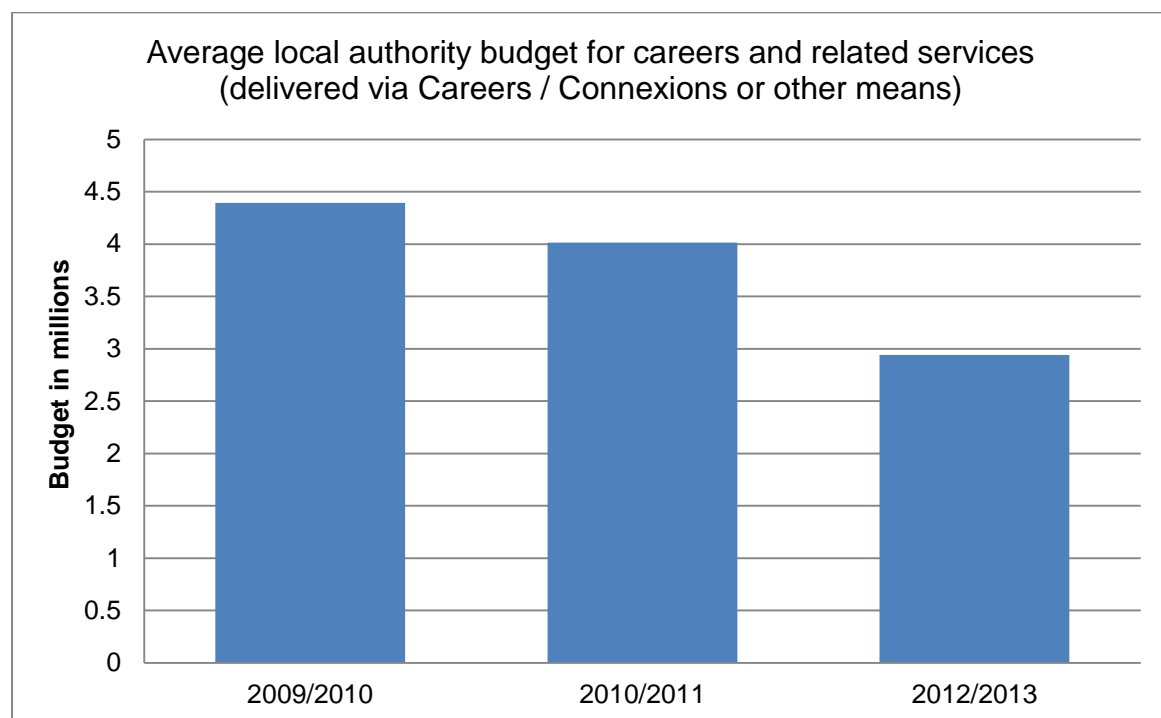
Figure 1: Combined feedback from the local authority and UNISON members' survey (n=83)¹ showing changes in levels of funding for career and youth support services in LAs since the election of the Coalition Government



LAs that responded to this question (n=32) detailed the decline in the budget for careers and related services over the last four years (see Figure 2).

¹LA responses (n=32), skipped (n=3), UNISON members responses (n=157). Findings based on one member response per local authority omitting 1 LA where there was a conflicting response and 102 duplicated answers.

Figure 2: Feedback from the local authority survey (n=32)² showing the average budget for careers and related services from 2009/10 to 2012/13



This suggests that on average LAs are spending around £1.4 million less a year on youth and career support than they did when the Coalition Government came to power. Clearly such figures should be treated with some caution, given the response rate; however, the picture of declining investment is clear. 85% of respondents in the UNISON members' survey also reported a decline in universal career and youth services, with much the same proportion (84%) reporting a decline in services for targeted groups (see Table 1).

² Skipped question (n=3), omitted (n=1).

Table 1: Feedback from the UNISON members' survey showing members' views on the cuts to universal (n=62) and targeted (n=67) career and youth services in local authorities³

Universal and targeted career and youth services since the election of the Coalition Government (UNISON member survey)				
	Universal (n=62)		Targeted (n=67)	
	Response (percent)	Response count	Response (percent)	Response count
Decreased	85%	53	84%	56
Same	15%	9	16%	11
Increased	0%	0	0%	0

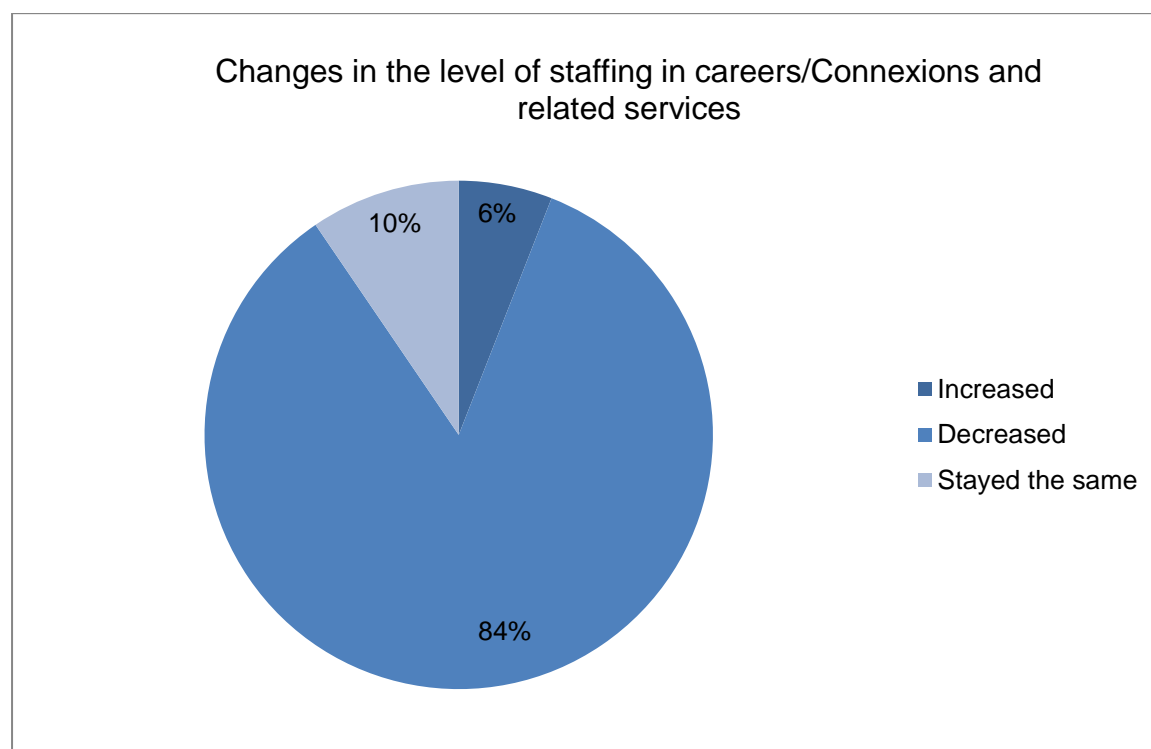
Staffing

The decrease in budget has resulted in the large-scale decommissioning of Connexions services and severe cuts to employment within the sector. The combined data from the LA and the UNISON members' survey (see Figure 3) showed that in 84% of LAs the number of staff employed in their careers/Connexions and related services had decreased since the election of the Coalition Government.

The respondents to the LA survey revealed a 47% decrease in employment cost in this area since 2009/10 (from £2,097m in 2009/10 to £1,109m in 2012/13), with the significant decrease spread across England.

³Findings were based on two separate questions for universal and targeted services. For each question the data includes one member response per local authority, with duplicate and/or conflicting responses being omitted from the universal (n=95) and targeted (n=88) data. (2 LAs skipped the targeted question).

Figure 3: Combined feedback from the local authority and UNISON members' survey (n=84) showing their views on staffing in careers/Connexions and related services since the election of the Coalition Government⁴

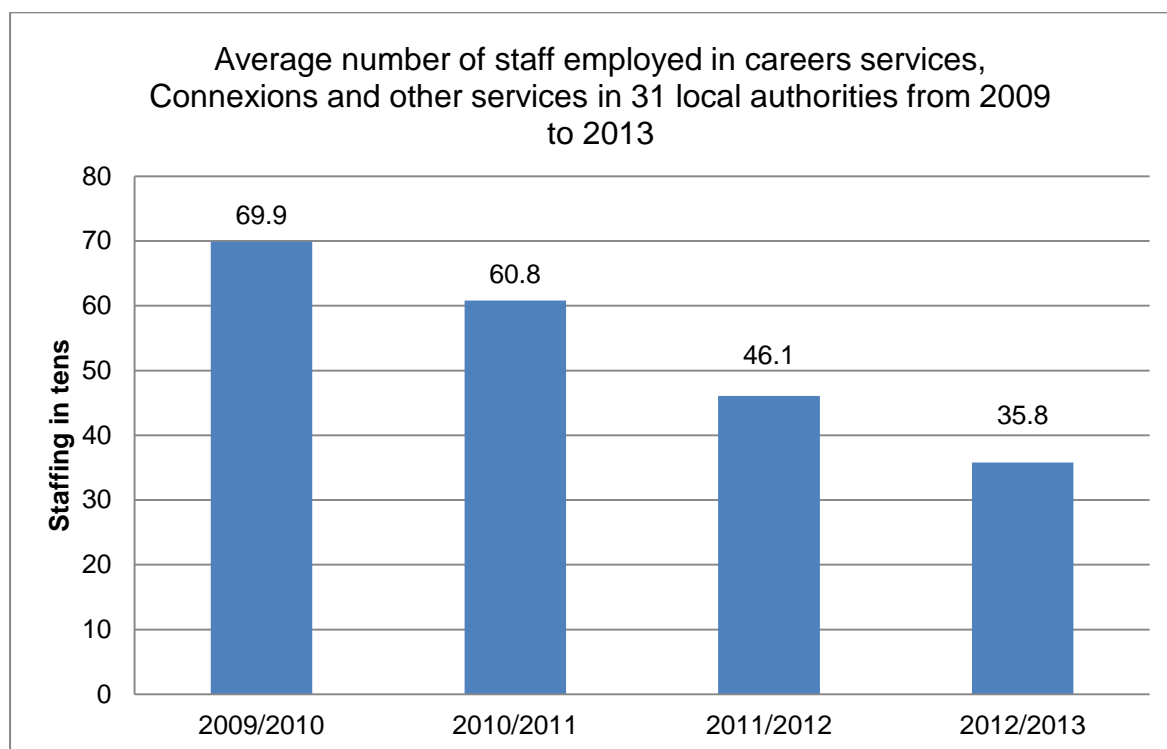


The LA survey provides more detail on this. It shows that across the authorities there has been some variation in employment levels. However, the data suggest that overall levels of employment in this sector have fallen between 2009/10 and 2012/13. Figure 4 sets out the average number of relevant employees in each LA over these four years, demonstrating a consistent year-on-year decline, with the level in 2012/13 being roughly half of that in 2009/10.

The overall picture is accordingly of rapidly declining professional and organisational capacity. This is a major concern, as it is likely that a large number of qualified careers professionals with postgraduate qualifications and experience have been lost to the profession either through taking early retirement or by moving on to other unrelated roles. Whether it will be possible to recover this professional capacity in the future, should policy in this area change, remains a key question.

⁴⁴ LA responses (n=31), skipped (n=5), UNISON members' responses (n=157). Findings based on one member response per LA, omitting 2 LAs where there were conflicting responses and 97 duplicated answers.

Figure 4: Average number of staff employed in careers/Connexions and related services (n=31)⁵ 2009-2013



Influence

Alongside the decline in resourcing revealed by this research, LAs have also seen a decline in their influence with local stakeholders. As already noted, increasing numbers of schools are in the process of becoming academies and removing themselves from any direct accountability to LAs. Again, much of the funding for interventions with young people such as that associated with the Youth Contract is managed nationally, rather than locally as Connexions was. Finally, the development of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) has served to muddy the question of local accountability, with many LEPs getting actively involved in issues relating to youth unemployment, careers and skills supply. In some cases the LEPs have been able to draw in new funding to address these issues and to manage this through a range of mechanisms (e.g. LEP Network, 2013).

One of the impacts of this weakening of LA influence has been to impose changes in the way that existing resources are spent by LAs. Whereas in the past LAs had statutory responsibilities in this area and a clear remit, in the new policy environment their role is more ambiguous. In the absence of any formal policy levers, LAs that wish to be active in this field are required to expend much of their resources on engaging and persuading partners rather than on direct delivery.

⁵ Skipped question (n=5).

3. The provision of universal career support

Universal career support describes those services which are offered to all young people. Such services may be delivered in ways that require participation (such as the delivery of careers education within the curriculum) or that offer an entitlement (such as making career guidance interviews available to those that want them). The rationale for the delivery of universal career support is that it can help all young people to achieve their potential. This might include finding a way forward for a young person who is disengaged with the educational system, but equally might include helping a fully-engaged young person to evaluate how a particular university course fits in with their longer-term aspirations. Universal approaches also have the advantage of including those young people who are not identified by imperfect targeting mechanisms.

Officially, the responsibility for providing universal career support has shifted to schools. The Government did not require LAs to manage the transition, but many opted to do so. However, the initial transitional period is now coming to an end, and while the new arrangements remain fluid, directions of travel are beginning to emerge. It is therefore an opportune time to consider the shape into which provision is settling.

The development of careers provision to 2010

Careers workers have been involved with schools in England since the Second World War. Peck (2004) describes how, from 1948, Youth Employment Officers were involved in liaising with schools and supporting the transitions of young people to the labour market. From the early 1970s the scope of careers work in schools began to grow, becoming more proactive and increasingly including careers education as well as advice and guidance.

Such work was typically organised around a partnership between the school and an external career guidance provider (Watts, 2008). Initially the partner's role was to deliver guidance interviews, but increasingly the partnership organisations became involved in supporting work in the curriculum and broader conceptions of the nature of careers work. Morris *et al.* (1995; 1999) demonstrated that the strongest development of students' career management skills was in schools characterised by close involvement of careers advisers in curriculum planning, review and development; by clear identification and appropriate use of the respective skills of teachers and career advisers; and by the guidance interview being viewed as just one element of an ongoing strategy for careers education and guidance.

Until the early 1990s, the partnership organisation was the Careers Service, which was provided by the LA. Following privatisation, the Careers Service was taken away from direct LA control and delivered through a range of organisational forms, but the partnership model was maintained as a central element of the privatised service. However, with the creation of Connexions, the weakening of the careers element of the service and the increasing focus on at-risk young people, the partnership model began to decline (Watts, 2008). By 2008 Connexions was returned to LA control, though often carried out through commissioning rather than direct delivery (McGowan *et al.*, 2008).

Thus, by the time the Coalition Government took power, the Connexions service was once more an LA concern. It was also a service under fire, with criticism of its focus coming from all sides, most notably from Alan Milburn's (2009) report on fair access to the professions. It

is nonetheless important to recall the successes of the service as well as its failures. In particular, the National Audit Office (2004) found that the service had made significant progress towards reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training. However, it also noted that the service was under-resourced to deliver on the objectives given to it by government. In addition, there were a number of design flaws, noted at the time when the service was established (Watts, 2001): notably, that while it was avowedly both a universal and targeted service, all its performance measures were related to its targeted aspects. Much of the subsequent policy discourse about the success or otherwise of Connexions has ignored the real resourcing and policy constraints under which the service operated and has attempted to simplify the debate by arguing, as Matthew Hancock (2013) has done, “that Connexions failed badly”, without seeking to understand the nature of that failure or the reasons for it.

While Connexions may have been ripe for change, it is important to remember that the service continued to put resources into universal careers provision and partnership working with schools throughout its life. While services may have become focused primarily on young people who were judged to be at risk of NEET outcomes, Connexions also provided more broadly-based careers resources, expertise and support for schools.

The decision by the Coalition Government to remove LAs’ responsibility in this area therefore needs to be understood as a response to the flawed but still functioning Connexions service. Connexions entered 2010 with considerable professional capacity, with relationships with schools and with an ongoing commitment to the delivery of both targeted and universal services. The subsequent changes need to be evaluated against this benchmark.

Current approaches to the delivery of career and youth support

The new arrangements relocate responsibility for careers provision to schools. Responses from both Directors of Children’s Services and UNISON members in the majority of LAs make it clear that the LA provision of universal career provision has either declined or effectively ceased.

Connexions had the remit to be both a direct delivery body and a change agent within the local education and employment system. It maintained relationships with schools and employers, as well as providing services for young people. The loss of Connexions has therefore created a number of holes in provision which have been plugged in different ways across different LAs.

Many members voiced their concerns about the quality of provision that now exists, noting that it is generally less comprehensive than in the past:

The Connexions service has moved from a universal service where all young people could access impartial advice and guidance to a targeted service aimed at supporting NEET, SEN and other vulnerable young people e.g. young carers and teenage parents.

It now exists as a minimalist service for what is left of the legal requirement.

The universal service has gone and we are now a targeted service.

Funding here is so much reduced that careers advisors (or personal advisers as we're now known) can no longer provide a universal guidance service to young people in schools and colleges. Instead we are restricted to working with a very small cohort of targeted individuals.

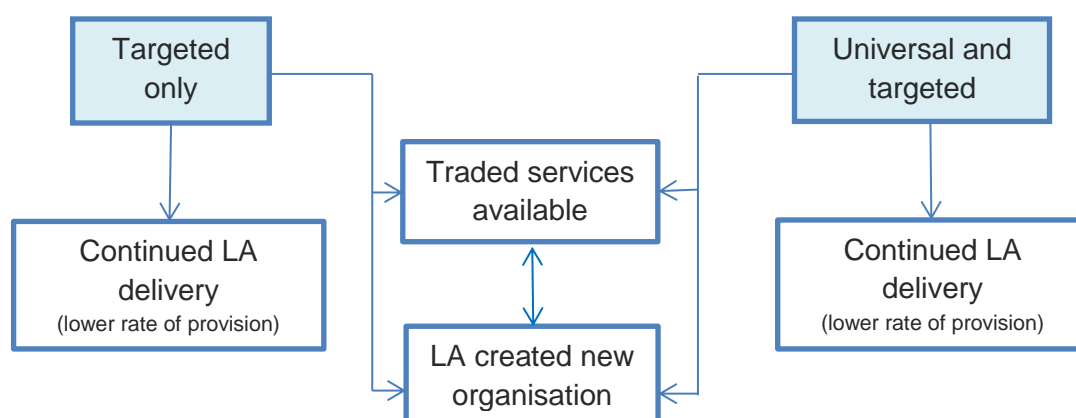
If the student does not fall into the "target group" they get no support from the local authority...

Overall it is clear from the data in this study that since the Education Act 2011 there has been a huge reduction in LA provision, and that LAs have essentially had to make a distinct decision: whether or not to continue funding universal careers provision at all. As targeted services are mandatory, these have been retained (at varying levels) in all authorities. However, of the 33 LAs that provided detailed feedback on their provision, around a third were still providing some level of fully-funded universal provision. As the above quotes demonstrate, concerns about the loss or diminution of the universal service was also a main focus of the qualitative comments in the UNISON members' survey, suggesting that nationally the fraction would be lower still.

It is important to note that the universal support currently available is not usually direct delivery of the kind that was common under Connexions. More usually, universal provision takes the form of support and guidance to manage the transition alongside other kinds of continuing consultancy support. The shape of what support remains will be discussed further in the next section.

So while some LAs have maintained a universal service of some kind, it is clear that the majority have not. However, the organisation of provision is currently more complex than just universal provision or no universal provision. These organisational changes mean that there is considerable diversity in the approaches taken to the delivery of career and youth support services. Figure 5 provides a conceptualisation of different LA approaches.

Figure 5: LA approaches to the delivery of career and youth support



Within some LA areas a traded service has been developed which has sought to provide additional universal and/or targeted services to schools on a commercial basis. The survey of Directors of Children's Services suggested that traded services were now available in

more than half of the authorities. Examples of this approach can be found in most authorities where there is still a major careers provider (usually former Connexions companies) as well as those like Leicester City where Connexions has been taken into the LA and a traded service has been developed. The presence of a traded service has allowed existing infrastructure to be kept in place where schools can be persuaded to purchase services. In one area, for example, thirteen secondary schools have jointly commissioned careers services from the LA. However, such arrangements are dependent on the willingness of schools to engage with them and commission their services. The long-term sustainability of such arrangements is unclear. UNISON members also raised concerns about the impact of such traded arrangements on the quality, impartiality and consistency of the advice delivered and noted the frequent lack of any serious quality-assurance and monitoring arrangements.

Some LAs have maintained existing organisational arrangements from before 2011 and are continuing to provide services or sub-contract them through similar channels. For example, the Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay LAs have continued to work with the LA-controlled company Careers Southwest. However, in some areas the LAs have needed to create a new department or organisation to deliver career and youth support services, following the withdrawal or collapse of existing sub-contractors (Connexions companies) or internal restructuring. Some LAs have decided to fold Connexions companies into existing internal youth support services. Such decisions to blend Connexions into wider youth support arrangements are often, but not always, associated with the loss of universal provision and a decreasing emphasis on careers work. There have also been attempts to create new organisations which have maintained a strong careers focus: for example, Solihull has renamed Connexions as Solihull Specialist Careers Service and its PAs as Specialist Careers Advisers.

What determines the way in which LAs have shaped their provision is unclear. Analysis of LA responses by the political party in control of the LA did not reveal any strong pattern. It is more likely that contextual and situational factors such as the history of careers provision in an LA, including the direct role of the LA in this provision, and factors relating to local leadership and capacity, have shaped current provision.

Managing this change

Despite different emphases in their approach, most of the LAs that responded directly to the survey argued that they were developing strategies to actively manage these policy changes and to ensure the best possible transition of responsibility to schools. The strategies that have been adopted include:

- providing support and guidance to schools;
- monitoring schools' provision;
- tracking young people;
- measuring the effectiveness and quality of LA careers provision.

In effect, all of these roles place LAs in a middle-tier position between schools and government. Government makes policy and schools implement it, but LAs support the implementation, monitor its success and provide some checks and balances. However, this situation raises a number of important questions. Firstly, how sustainable are LAs continued

middle-tier roles given their lack of a formal statutory role in this area and the likelihood of continuing cuts to LA budgets? Local Government Association Chairman Sir Merrick Cockell recently remarked (LGA, 2013c):

This Government is testing the resilience of councils to breaking point and in many areas the cracks are starting to show. 2015/16 is shaping up as the crunch year and we expect some councils to be placed in a position where they do not have the money they need to meet their statutory obligations.

If this does prove to be the case, it seems unlikely that LAs can continue to justify non-statutory activity such as that related to youth and careers support.

Secondly, it is unclear as to how far LAs play this middle-tier role for all schools in their area, including academies and free schools. The survey did not directly ask about this, but the data available to us suggest that at present LAs are not discriminating for the delivery of most services in this area: more research could illuminate this further.

Finally, there is a question as to whether any other organisation could play this middle-tier role, such as academy chains which Hill *et al.* (2012) note are frequently taking on many of the administrative functions previously undertaken by LAs. However, at present there is little evidence of academy chains playing a proactive role in the area of careers. Other alternative middle-tier organisations might include the National Careers Service or the LEPs. But shifting this middle-tier function would require the dismantling of the infrastructure and professional capacity that exists within LAs and rebuilding it elsewhere. This clearly raises questions about what would be gained from such a move (as well as what could be lost).

Providing information, advice and guidance to schools

Many LAs have either ceased or reduced direct delivery of universal career support in schools. In its place, however, they have sought to assist schools in a variety of ways (detailed below in Table 2). The most popular strategy is to assist schools to understand and implement their new duty by delivering briefings to them. In addition to this, many authorities have developed a traded service which enables them to preserve some staffing and expertise in the LA in order to provide schools with access to some universal careers support. Whether such traded services are proving to be self-funding is not yet apparent, but is likely to be important for the sustainability of such approaches. A range of other approaches, including signposting, underpinning support (e.g. provision of labour market information) and consultancy, were also described by some LAs.

Table 2: Feedback from local authorities (n=34)⁶ detailing LA support provided to schools

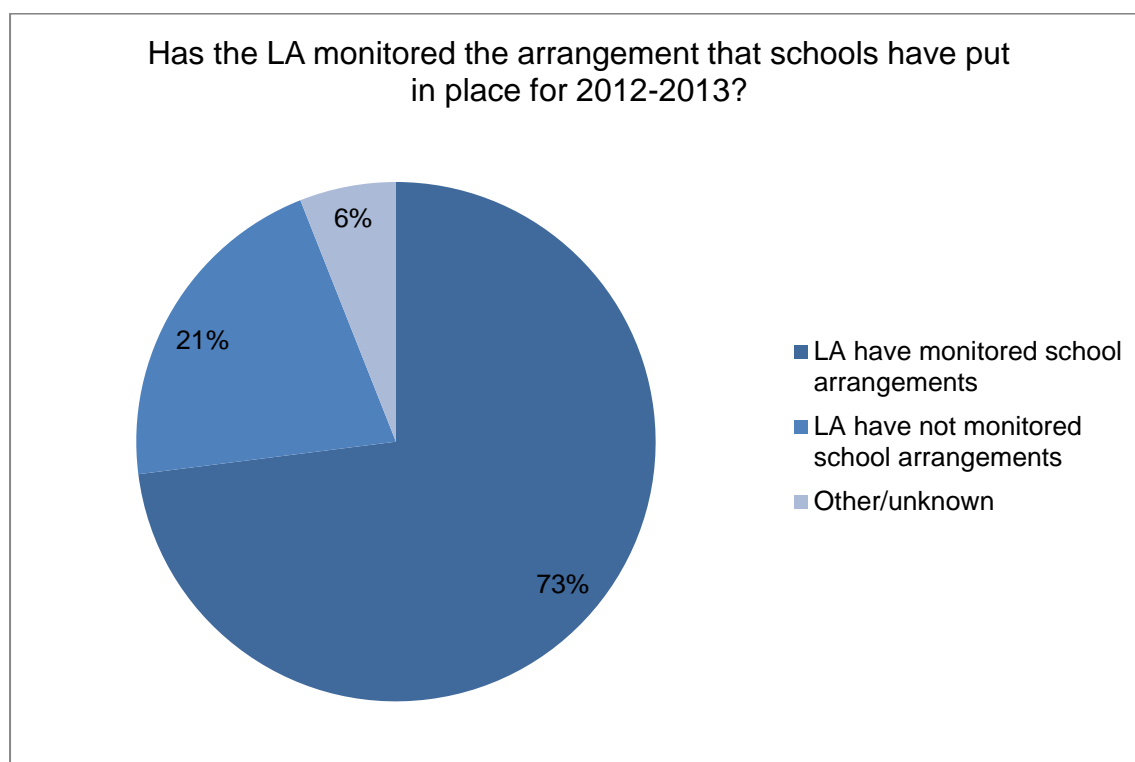
What support has the LA provided to schools to assist them in taking on the new duty for securing access for pupils to independent and impartial careers guidance? (Please tick all that apply)		
	Response (percent)	Response count
Briefings	82.4%	28
Providing a traded service	61.8%	21
Provision of information on training providers and opportunities	55.9%	19
Provision of information on work-based learning opportunities	52.9%	18
Provision of labour market information	44.1%	15
Consultancy support	38.2%	13
Guidance on commissioning	26.5%	9
Commissioning services on behalf of schools	20.6%	7
Lists of approved suppliers	17.6%	6

Monitoring schools' provision

The majority of LAs that responded to the survey were monitoring the arrangements that all schools in their area (not just those still under LA control) have made to ensure continued careers provision (as shown by Figure 6).

⁶ Skipped question n=2.

Figure 6: LAs' (n=35)⁷ monitoring of schools' career and youth support provision



Here LAs are continuing to act as a “middle tier” between government and schools, supporting schools to interpret and respond to new policies and directives. This kind of middle-tier role is not one which LAs have any statutory remit to undertake, although they may conceive of it as part of a broader strategy to address NEET levels and the Raising of the Participation in Learning Age.

LAs have utilised a number of strategies to monitor schools' provision, including:

- meetings with school career co-ordinators/IAG leads
- setting up service-level agreements, contracts and/or termly review processes
- monitoring through providing a traded service
- school adviser visits
- informal monitoring through broader LA contacts with schools

A few LAs noted that they had insufficient capacity to be able to monitor a large number of schools. Others commented on the difficulties of engaging the schools in the process of monitoring. Nevertheless, most LAs that responded to the survey monitored schools in some way.

Tracking young people

94% of LAs that responded to the survey tracked young people's progression in some way. LAs described a range of tools that they used to undertake this tracking, including the Client

⁷ Skipped question n=1

Caseload Information System (CCIS) and the Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) database. Respondents also described how this process of tracking works:

We share data with schools, colleges, training providers, apprenticeship providers and neighbouring LAs to get a robust picture of participation across the county [to] ensure statutory duties are met. Typically “unknown” levels for yr 12-14 young people is 1.5% or less.

We complete many of the tasks previously delivered by Connexions including using college lists to update client records, home visits, starters and leavers lists from training providers etc.

While a few reported that use of such systems was minimal, the majority were regularly using tracking systems, often supported by a range of follow-up strategies including telephone calls, home visits and collecting information from post-16 training providers. This is likely to be influenced by LAs’ statutory responsibilities for tracking young people and supporting RPA. The Government is keen that such data will reveal poor performance by councils in addressing NEETs. However, such ambitions may be undercut both by the declining professional capacity of LAs to intervene into young people’s journeys into and out of NEET, as well as by a likely reduction in the data quality of tracking information following the loss of such capacity. One authority described how this loss of capacity was impacting on their ability to track young people:

In [LA] 60.43% of year 14s are not known (18 and 19 year olds) and we are aware that the number of not knowns is high in areas where there have been stringent cuts.

The loss of professional capacity therefore results in the reporting of destination figures that mask the level of NEET.

Measuring effectiveness and quality of provision in the local authority

LAs provided extensive data on how they measure the effectiveness of the provision in the local area, using a range of output measures such as:

- the percentage of NEET (often including breakdowns for vulnerable groups such as BME, youth offenders, care leavers, young carers, teenage parents, unknowns), plus the percentage of those at risk of becoming NEET;
- the percentage of successful transitions to post-16 learning.

However, such output measures are a blunt instrument for assessing the quality of careers provision. LAs also provided some information about how they measure the quality of career and youth support in the local area; but uptake was patchy across authorities and some were vague about the measures. Examples of quality assurance and enhancement included:

- Ensuring that staff were qualified to at least NVQ Level 4 or 6.
- Having termly CPD events for career co-ordinators in schools.
- Partnership reviews with schools to evaluate delivery.
- Observations of practice.
- Monthly caseload management.

- Evidence of school activities and termly quality reviews.
- Feedback from partners, staff and young people, some through formative evaluation.

LAs are therefore typically seeking to measure progression and student outcomes. However, far fewer are seeking to measure the quality of the provision that is taking place within their authority, and those that do so give no specific information about what the measures involve. For example, it is unclear how the quality of staffing and training is being monitored both within the LAs and within those organisations sub-contracted by either schools or the LAs. While the Matrix standard is frequently endorsed, it is unknown how this is being enforced and monitored. Given this diversity of provision, there would seem to be value in further thinking about whether a national approach to quality is desirable.

What are the implications for schools?

The patchiness of career education and guidance provision across schools has been noted by recent studies in this area (Coffait, 2013; Ofsted, 2013). Over half of the LAs echoed this and reported that in general schools in their area had reduced the level of careers provision available. Hutchinson (2013) has shown how some of the reasons for this diversity of approach are associated with the approach taken by school leaders and middle leaders. However, the present study suggests that the role taken by LAs also sets an important context within which schools' responses are formulated. Where LAs are continuing to fund universal services, schools will be provided with a service, though probably at a reduced rate due to funding cuts. But where LAs fund little or no provision, this makes greater demands on schools to develop their own approaches. The level of priority accorded to careers work within schools is likely to vary according to:

- the needs and perceived needs of pupils in the school;
- the anticipated level of NEET destinations;
- the school budget;
- the levels of students identified as vulnerable (and therefore eligible for additional resourcing from the LA);
- the staffing/capability to deliver the service;
- the value placed on delivering careers support by the headteacher and senior leadership team.

4. How have targeted services been affected?

LAs have retained responsibility for targeted services. In many cases such services are now situated alongside a number of other children's services.

Some of the targeted services that are offered are statutory: the local authority has to ensure that a legal obligation is met. For example, Section 139a assessments are carried out so that those with a learning difficulty or disability have their needs and wishes taken into consideration to ensure a successful transition to post-16 education, training or employment. Other support procedures such as Common Assessment Framework (CAF), Team Around the Child (TAC) or Child in Need (CIN) meetings may not necessarily be statutory, but will often be common practice within many LAs to ensure that children, young people and families who are in need receive timely support. There are then a host of services which can target very specific groups (for example, Targeted Youth Support, or parenting support) that can be commissioned or bought-in by those who require such expertise.

Targeted services therefore cover a wide range of different types of provision. Some of these are largely distinct from careers support and relate to wider types of support. Others can be seen as a specialised kind of careers support aimed at particular client groups (usually those with barriers that inhibit participation in formal learning and the labour market). Connexions sought to draw all of these services together; however, this created a number of professional tensions (Watts, 2001). Recent policy seems to have exacerbated some of these tensions, placing further demands on broader support services whilst continuing to weaken the professionalism of careers services.

The weakening of the career profession results from the declining size of the workforce, the blending of remaining staff into more general services and the reduction of universal careers provision. Taken together, such changes reduce the space for careers professionalism to be enacted and the level of professional capacity within each local authority for both universal and targeted services.

The development of targeted services within Connexions

Prior to the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the careers service was a universal service which addressed the needs of all, with targeted services being regarded as a separate entity, delivered by a range of other services and professionals who were also usually located in the LAs or in associated elements of the third sector (Watts, 2001). After 1997, however, such targeted services were merged with universal services into a new Connexions service which sought to counter social inequality and encourage closer agency working (Watts, 2001; Artaraz, 2008; Cullen *et al.*, 2009).

While the new Connexions service was defined as both a universal *and* a targeted service, its primary concern was those considered "at risk". For all intents and purposes, Connexions was a targeted service, with a broad definition of who was entitled to its targeted services. Typically, services were addressed to a range of vulnerable groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) or who were NEET (Watts, 2001; Cullen *et al.*, 2009). Connexions was also designed to unite a range of professionals from youth, offending and education services to deliver a multidisciplinary service which accommodated the diverse needs of clients. However, in reality it was only the careers service that was

totally subsumed into Connexions, with many of the newly termed Personal Advisers being renamed Careers Advisers (Watts, 2001; Artaraz, 2008; Cullen et al, 2009).

It is apparent that access to careers provision has changed over time. In general, the trend has been towards the rationing of services based on identifying which young people might benefit most from such services. Despite advancing a critique of Connexions, the current Government's approach has accelerated this trend.

How has the definition of targeting changed?

All LAs continue to have a legal responsibility to provide a service for targeted groups. However, there has been variation across LAs in the nature of the groups who were classed as vulnerable or worthy of targeting. In the past, Connexions partnerships were often able to define vulnerability broadly; however, this definition has typically narrowed under the new arrangements. Some LA respondents indicated that they focused on fewer "vulnerable" groups than others. For example, while in one LA a core offer was provided only to those with LDD, in others there was a wider focus which included youth offenders or NEET young people. Consequently some vulnerable young people are not getting the support they need: this was of great concern to UNISON members who commented that schools tended to focus career support on those who they perceived as the most vulnerable pupils. With no clear definition, entitlement is context-bound and variable across LAs, as can be seen from Table 3.

Table 3: The provision of career and related support to vulnerable groups

Does your local authority provide or commission career and related support for young people who are: (please tick those that apply)		
	Response (percent)	Response count
Teenage parents	94.4%	34
NEET	94.4%	34
Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)	94.4%	34
At risk of becoming NEET	91.7%	33
In the 'looked after' system	91.7%	33
Young offenders	91.7%	33
Care leavers	86.1%	31
School action plus	75.0%	27
Home educated	75.0%	27
Lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual or questioning (LGTBQ)	63.9%	23
School action	58.3%	21
Any other groups	36.1%	13

Comments from UNISON members included:

The definition of vulnerable has changed. Far fewer clients are now classed as vulnerable. Clients who were previously considered vulnerable are no longer entitled to any support.

The criteria to be in the target group are subjective, and very school dependent, and don't capture all of the most vulnerable young people.

Some young people who are considered mainstream fall through the net, when in fact they are vulnerable. The criteria for vulnerable is not a catch all.

I feel that the vulnerable and disaffected no longer have access to support agencies.

We face a further 20% reduction in budget over the next two years and expect the service to NEETs to be restricted to specific groups. Even being NEET will not be sufficient to get you a careers guidance and support service!

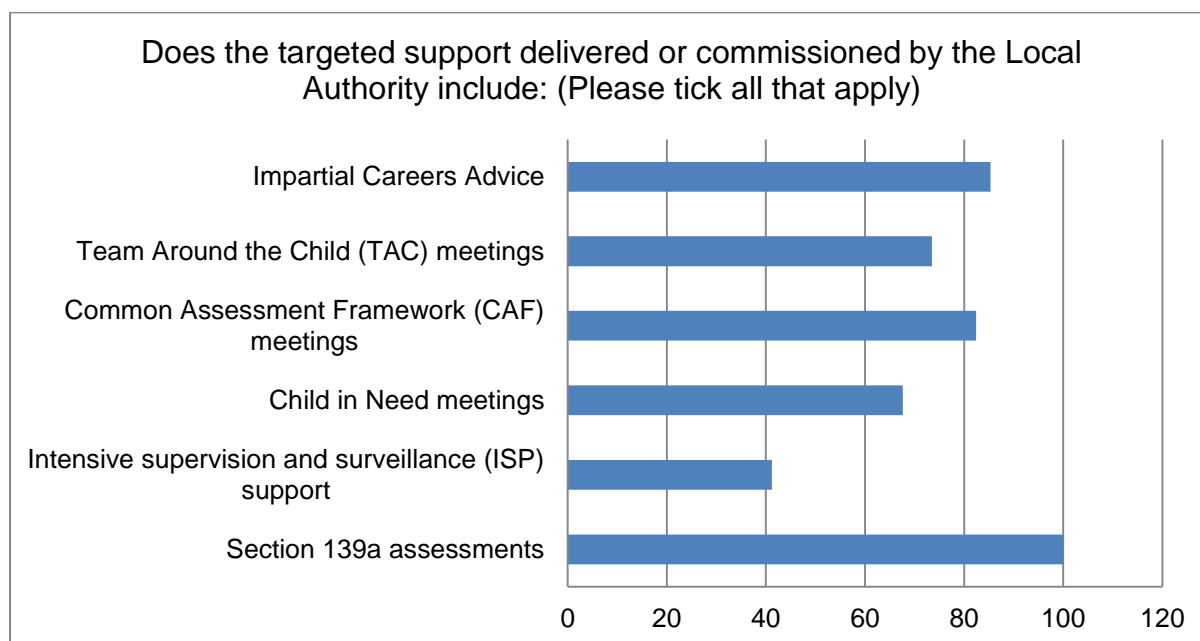
This variation in local definition is often linked to the approach that LAs have taken to preventing NEET outcomes. Following the initial work of RPA pilot schemes (DfE, 2012b), many LAs developed local Risk Of NEET Indicators (RONIs) to predict and identify those at risk and thus requiring timely support. RONIs, which consist of a range of “hard” measurable factors and “soft” personal and attitudinal data, naturally vary according to locality (Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012b). Each LA will use its RONI system to work with schools to identify their most vulnerable groups and develop solutions based on an understanding of the common reasons and risk factors for non-participation in employment, education or training (DfE, 2012b). It could be argued that these can direct support to those who need it most and are valuable in providing tailored support for those in the LA. However, it is inevitable that the decisions made by LAs will be driven by a mix of individuals’ support needs (as determined by the RONIs or other means) and resource considerations (what support can be afforded).

The narrowing of the targeted group was of great concern to UNISON members and is likely to have greatest impact in LAs with high levels of unemployment and large numbers of vulnerable young people, as support in such areas is likely to be limited and difficult to access. The focus on specific groups such as young people with LDD or in the “looked after” care system also has implications for career professionals who previously may have worked primarily with mainstream students or conversely may have specialised in one target group which may no longer be a main focus in the LA.

How have services changed?

Despite the cuts to targeted services and some LAs streamlining the services to include fewer vulnerable groups within targeted support, the actual service that they are providing is still typically broad. As shown below (Figure 7), 85% of targeted support includes targeted impartial careers advice (although how this is defined is likely to vary), alongside activities such as Section 139a assessments which are a statutory obligation, and the other types of support (on the chart below) that link with key drivers such as safeguarding and the Every Child Matters agenda.

Figure 7: Feedback from local authorities (n=34)⁸ detailing what targeted support is delivered or commissioned by the LA



A range of other services are also included within targeted services, including:

- Careers advice for post-16 NEET young people.
- Targeted Youth Support teams which work on challenging behaviour including drug abuse and school exclusions.
- Services for young parents and carers.
- Youth offending service.
- Intensive support for looked-after children.
- NEET prevention and support (+ in-school prevention).

As can be seen, each of these activities can potentially link to careers work in different ways. However, it is unclear how far LAs have a clear line of referral from this wider range of services for vulnerable young people who need more intensive career support.

The survey of UNISON members suggests that the provision of support for young people who are no longer in education has become highly variable. Members described how the reduction of professional capacity had negatively impacted on the provision of services for NEET young people.

Ten professional (level 6) careers advisers have been made redundant. Four remaining advisers de-skilled by being moved to different departments to focus exclusively on statemented looked after young people. Only one adviser now employed in the generic role on a renewable contract. Agency advisers are now employed for ad hoc work....Currently no service at all for general NEETs.

⁸ Skipped question n=2

Most young people in [LA] cannot access a face to face or telephone service from us. We are hidden in a Children in Need team and people do not know how to get hold of us.....we have limited resources and funds to support and assist our clients.

Such comments suggest that it is not just the provision of services within school that have suffered as a result of the cuts, but also wider youth support. The loss of LA capacity to support those young people who are NEET is particularly troubling given the continuing LA responsibility in this area and the widespread concern about youth unemployment.

5. Implications of the change

So far this report has sought to describe the ways in which provision has changed. This section will build upon this by looking at the implications that exist for the different stakeholders involved in this change.

Local authorities

As has already been suggested, the policy changes have placed LAs in a difficult position. On one hand, they have been absolved of any responsibility relating to universal careers provision. On the other, however, they have retained responsibilities for tracking young people, addressing levels of NEET and ensuring the effective implementation of RPA. LAs are therefore left in the position of having considerable responsibility but little power. Meanwhile, many of the services that previously might have been delivered by LAs or their agents are now either delivered by academies and Youth Contract providers reporting to national government, or are no longer specified by government.

In practice, many LAs have tried to manage the shift in responsibility and to retain some tools with which to continue to support young people's careers and meet their responsibilities relating to tracking, NEET and RPA. This often means that LAs are operating in excess of their statutory duty as they try to support young people. They also have to employ an array of tools designed to influence and inform other players who are active in this space, although in practice many of these tools provide rather weak levers to influence the behaviour of schools, Youth Contract providers and other organisations. The complexity of the local picture is likely to increase if the National Careers Service also begins to play a supportive brokerage role in relation to schools, as the Government is proposing it should (DfE & DBIS, 2013). At present, local democratic accountability over how public money is spent on youth and career support is extremely weak. There is also little or no accountability to young people themselves: there is a case for looking at whether existing LA supported youth council initiatives might have a role to play in this area.

Schools

Previous studies have revealed considerable concerns about the provision of careers support in schools. These concerns were echoed by many of the UNISON members who responded to this survey. Particular concerns raised by members included schools' capabilities and motivations to deliver informed and impartial career guidance:

Despite being told by [Michael Gove] that schools are best placed to decide what careers service they want, in practice, schools have opted for the cheapest option in almost all cases and are not proving to be objective and unbiased in their information.

Lack of understanding of the importance of good careers guidance. Local schools not offering impartial advice to young people and instead railroading them into their own 6th form provision or offering biased opinions on post 16 provision for reasons not in the interests of the young people.

The recent decision by Ofsted to begin to more actively inspect career guidance may provide a stronger incentive for schools to engage with the area. However, the inspection criteria remain limited, and it is unclear what the level of impact of this move will be. One member addressed this in responding to the survey, arguing that the inspection would be too light-touch to shift schools' behaviour in this area:

If schools can show good destination statistics, some information availability and that some staff time is being given to careers guidance then they will pass the inspection.

The survey of UNISON members who worked in schools found that the majority of career support that was being offered in their schools was being provided by non-teaching support staff: typically youth workers, administrators, peer mentors and curriculum advisers. Around half of these were providing career support in addition to their existing duties.

Many respondents discussed the notion of it being a "postcode lottery" where some schools invest time and resources, whereas others just do the minimum to meet the legal requirement:

Schools taking responsibility has been a disaster for careers guidance, we now have a situation where some young people are getting no support at all depending on their school. It's a real postcode lottery...

UNISON members also discussed how career guidance is likely to have to compete with other services in the school's budget and may result in cost-cutting when providing services in-house or contracting-in traded services:

Having schools find it from their own budgets automatically means it has to compete for overstretched funding.

One respondent to the survey of members in schools described how this worked in practice through the provision of a limited budget to pay for career support:

The budget is limited. Once the funds are gone it is gone, there is no more advice. I know young people who haven't been able to get advice – and referred instead to a website. The statutory employed advisors at the local authority are only allowed to work with NEET young people.

Members also expressed doubts about the professionalism of the service that is available in schools. They argued that many of the staff delivering career support within schools have either no or very limited qualifications in career guidance:

Leaving guidance to schools to deliver with no additional funding has resulted in poor quality IAG provided by poor or non-trained staff.

They noted that frequently the role is combined with a teaching role and that this may leave staff with little opportunity to deliver career guidance:

Most schools have no service and rely on careers co-ordinators who also have full teaching commitments, are not impartial and have very little specialised training.

In addition, they noted that the move to school-based employment (either directly or via a contract/supplier model) has resulted in downward pressure on the pay and conditions of careers workers.

Despite such criticisms, it is clear that many schools are attempting to do their best to implement the policy. However, their capacity to do so is highly dependent on both the availability of their resourcing and the level of support that they receive from the LA. Despite the rhetoric of school autonomy, it is clear from these surveys that LAs are continuing to play an important role in the ongoing delivery of career and youth support. It is arguable that such a middle-tier role has been essential in ensuring the effective transfer of responsibility to schools and in many cases in undergirding the provision that is offered by them. Given this, a key question for schools is how far they can continue to rely on LAs to play this role in a tightening fiscal environment without LAs having any clear statutory remit in this area. If LAs are not to play this middle-tier role, is it possible that any alternative bodies such as academy chains or the National Careers Service can do so?

Career professionals

The new policy has had dramatic effects on the careers profession itself. Previous research has demonstrated that there have been very considerable numbers of redundancies from LAs and Connexions companies (Hooley & Watts, 2011). The respondents to the LA survey revealed a 47% decrease in employment from 2009/10, and ongoing UNISON monitoring of the situation suggests that a similar pattern can be found across the country. This process is continuing: at the time of writing, UNISON has been notified by members in a large city-based service of the threat of between 80 and 100 redundancies.

The members who responded to the survey represent those who have kept their jobs within LA structures. Others have set up consultancies, been employed by schools or left the profession altogether. The members who responded to the survey revealed two main issues for career professionals:

1. Increasing demands on professionals' time.
2. Low morale.

Increasing demands on professionals' time

The move to school-based provision has been a difficult transition for many careers practitioners, and members discussed many practicalities which affect their ability to do their job. For example, many referred to not having a "base" from which to work, and described how this led to isolation:

I know that the majority of my colleagues no longer have a room in school from which to see young people and that careers advice is patchy in most at best.

I hate having no base. I have to work from home during school holidays which I do not like. We are not given stationery, pens, stamps for letters and have to buy our own.

Members also discussed the pressure of having to deliver the same, if not an increased, level of support, with fewer resources and often additional family and youth support work

being added on to their role. With careers professionals in most situations now being expected to occupy broader social, pastoral and mentoring roles, it is debatable how much of their role remain focused on their core careers expertise.

For some UNISON members, the evolution of their role has resulted in an increase in stress and anxiety:

My job is now causing me a lot of stress and anxiety as we are expected to do a lot more, whilst at the same time having our terms and conditions undermined bit by bit. I do not feel part of a team most of the time and am isolated in my work.

UNISON members also revealed that they had experienced worsening pay and conditions, with some describing salary cuts and increases in working hours. Furthermore, with schools given no additional money for careers provision, there are concerns about whether they will continue to prioritise funding to ensure that services are delivered by qualified careers professionals. Some responses to the survey of UNISON members in schools suggested that some schools were already moving away from using qualified staff:

On school in [LA] has employed a retired former school liaison officer who worked at a local sixth form college who is not careers qualified and does not know about the range of local provision. He is doing "careers guidance". Apparently the Head has confidence in him because she has known him for years.

Low morale

UNISON members described morale as being very low amongst those careers workers who remained in LAs. Many discussed how they had become disenchanted with the profession and were disappointed and upset by the undervaluing of their expertise and experience:

The staff (or at least those qualified in careers guidance) are demoralised and leaving in droves.

It feels like the professional is not valued. Many experienced and dedicated advisers have been made redundant. Remaining staff have low morale, increased workloads, lack of time to offer "quality interventions", etc.

Another adviser stated that they were "disheartened, demotivated and bored" following the process of change.

Many of the trends identified by members in the survey echo previous concerns about professionalism in the Connexions service. Lewin & Colley (2009) noted that staff were over-stretched and beleaguered towards the end of the last Government. It is clear that the trends that they highlighted have accelerated following the implementation of the new policy direction under the Coalition Government. In further discussion of this research, Colley (2012) highlighted the "emotional and ethical labour" being performed by Connexions workers. She argued that careers advisors were investing so much emotionally in their work that they experienced stress, frustration and alienation. She also discussed how bureaucracy and oversized caseloads had an effect on the quantity and quality of client support, which created much disappointment amongst careers advisors.

The qualitative data collected through the UNISON members' survey discussed in this report suggest that many of the trends identified by Colley have continued or accelerated under the Coalition Government. The majority of, if not all, respondents were disenchanted with careers provision as it stands and on a personal and professional level had found the demands ever more difficult to cope with. Crucially, they felt that time and target pressures had an impact on the quality of their work and tended to drive them towards providing a more superficial service focusing on the provision of information to clients. One important aspect of this is the way in which the fragmentation of employment contexts (LAs, careers companies, schools, self-employment) has reduced the capacity of careers workers to access continuing professional development (CPD). This threatens to reduce professional engagement and ultimately to impact negatively on the delivery of services to young people.

Young people

Finally, it is valuable to highlight the impact that the policy has had on young people themselves. It is clear from the LA survey that the decreased careers budget and subsequent reduction in staffing and resources have affected the availability of careers provision for all young people. Some, namely those who are not classed as "vulnerable", are now fully dependent on the patchy delivery that exists across England's schools. In general, the movement of responsibility to schools has resulted in a reduction of both the quantity and quality of provision. UNISON members felt that the consequence of this was a generation of young people who were increasingly unclear about their post-16 choices:

My colleagues and I have noticed an increase in young people who have not had any advice or guidance at school, and therefore struggle to make decisions about post 16 options.

The lack of high quality, independent IAG, particularly in school is meaning young people are taking inappropriate courses at college and subsequently abandoning the course early with little options to return to study.

Many UNISON members said that young people no longer have default access to face-to-face careers advice, particularly during key transition points such as choosing a college course, and as a result make unassisted decisions which in some circumstances can lead to young people dropping out of courses. While there have always been dropout rates, members were concerned that these rates are now higher because there is less preventative careers work.

Where universal careers support was given, members queried whether this was impartial and discussed how a professional's focus on destination data can infiltrate a young person's decision, encouraging them to go to destinations such as university, regardless of whether that destination is right for them or not:

The push for pupils in school to have a destination, regardless of appropriateness or the pupil knowing all the options, is leading to the wrong people on the wrong courses. They either continue unhappily or they drop out. Destination figures do not equate to good careers information, advice or guidance.

Where support is available, it tends to be targeted to those young people who are judged to be “vulnerable”. LAs still have a remit to work with this group. Consequently much LA activity is focused on those who are NEET or who are judged to be at risk of becoming NEET. Those who are not judged to be vulnerable are far less likely to be able to access career support. However, it is clear that mainstream students are also likely to experience a range of career issues which they are currently likely to be unsupported in addressing.

6. Ways forward

The Coalition Government's policy on youth career support is increasingly being seen as a failing policy. At a recent event organised by the Westminster Employment Forum, the Chair of the House of Commons Education Committee Graham Stuart (2013) described the issue as "the elephant in Michael Gove's red box", arguing that the policy was leading to "huge amounts of money and potential ... being wasted". At the same event, Karen Adriaanse from Ofsted summarised the situation by saying that "when we explored the policy at those 60 schools, only a few schools ran with it, while others were left hanging. And that's why we have recommended to the Government that there needs to be much clearer guidance and clearer support."

This research supports these criticisms. It has found that despite the decision to relocate responsibility for careers provision with schools, this responsibility remains split, with LAs retaining a role both in supporting the transition and in providing ongoing services to schools and to individuals. Such a role is problematic given the diminishing resources and influence of LAs and the lack of clarity around their role, particularly with respect to services in schools.

The research also highlights concerns about the way in which the policy changes have impacted on schools, on the careers profession and on young people themselves. It is clear that the new arrangements have resulted in a decline in the quality and quantity of provision. The question therefore remains as to how best to address this situation, starting from the current position.

It is not the role of a study such as this one to set out detailed new policies. It is suggested that the recommendations of the House of Commons Education Committee (2013b) could provide a useful starting point in the construction of a new policy. However, there are a number of further questions that are suggested by this study which should be taken into account in any future policy development in this area:

- Is the development of a "postcode lottery" of careers provision an acceptable outcome of school autonomy? If not, what guidance, resourcing and quality assurance is necessary to put into place in order to ensure a minimum common standard?
- Is there a continuing role for a middle-tier body between central government and schools? Should LAs continue to play this role to support schools in the development of their provision? Can LAs be expected to continue to play this role for all schools in their areas including academies and free schools? Do academy chains have a role in this area? How will any proposed role for the National Careers Service relate to the co-ordinating activity that remains in the LAs?
- Is there a role for local democratic accountability in the delivery of youth and career support? If so, is this best delivered through the LAs or through some other mechanism? Should it also include some accountability to young people themselves, perhaps through existing youth parliament or youth council structures that exist within most LA areas?

- How can professional capacity and professional standards be maintained now that the profession has become scattered? Should a greater attempt be made to regulate careers support and to require it to be delivered by professionals? Should Government and the new Career Development Institute be concerned about the apparently very low morale that currently exists within the careers profession?

There is clearly a strong argument for reviewing existing policies on career and youth support. It is hoped that the findings of this research may be useful to the current Government, or if necessary the next one, in undertaking the task of ensuring the best careers and youth support system for England's young people.

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